SELF PUBLISHER!

★ MAGAZINE ★

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NICK CUTI
TONY & NICOLE NESSCA
WINSTON BLAKELY

VICTOR DANDRIGE & VANTAGE

SNEAK PEEKS!

EARTH BLOOD

ZEIN
THE LAST PHARAOH

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SELF PUBLISHER MAGAZINE

Here we are again. I have been increasingly pleased with the general buzz I've seen out there about the work we're doing with SP! More and more, people are seeming to "get" what this thing is about. And that is significant, because "Self Publishing" means many things to many people... In fact, if you go around asking people who are publishing stuff, what it means, you will be astounded by the variety of answers. And I think it's easy to fall into the trap that, because of that, this is a complicated, hard to grasp thing, when it really isn't. Because it can mean something different to each person, it is really a simple as finding out what self publishing means to YOU.

We can try to understand the whole range of meanings and try to cater to all of it, till we're blue in the face. Or we can continue on the path that I decided when we began this run of SP!, fifteen issues ago. SP! is about getting to know each person and, by doing that, caring about the work they make. I think that is what has made this stretch of issues, more than any of the variations of SP! I have run over the decades, the most satisfying. Getting to know the creators. Getting to know the writers who are working with me to do the interviews. But there is still one aspect of things that is missing.

The audience. I have continued to try to figure out and crack the code as to why SP! does not have a readership in the 10,000's... and have continued to come up short. I have tried to explore and investigate a number of avenues of thought. I'm stuck. All I can do is try to continue to toss stuff against the wall, and see the things that stick—what people are actually stopping to look at. I've been testing out some things in the weekly SPA Newsletter and have noticed solid results on the listing of things that are new. I am not yet sure that going ahead and doing the same thing in the magazine is going to do anything, but I do think the magazine needs something that connects to readers on a more "need to come back each issue" basis. We tend to see the fans of creators check out the issue and see what else is in it, but then return to their lives without fully engaging with the magazine, without them telling two friends, and so on and so on.

Your opinions and suggestions are completely welcome. Let's hear 'em!

- Ian Shires

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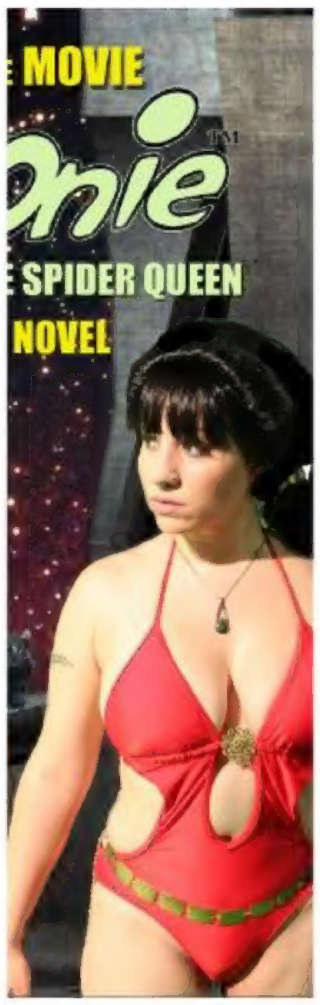

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Join the Self Publisher forums at: www.selfpubmag.com

VICTOR DANDRIDGE & VANTAGE

Inhouse Productions

By: Louise Cochran-Mason

Victor Dandridge is a comic book creator from Ohio. He is primarily a writer, but also illustrates and letters many of his own books. He studied commercial and advertising art at Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Centre. Victor has worked for Freestyle Komics and Air Strip 27, as a writer and an artist respectively. He self-publishes the majority of his comics. He founded the WizWorld imprint, which became Vantage: Inhouse Production in 2011.

The Published Works of Victor Dandridge

Hotshot - "Hero's Welcome" Issues 1-6	Writer	Freestyle Komics	2006-2013
Omnibus Issue 1	Writer Artist Letterer	WizWorld Inc.	2010
Doing a Bid: How to Approach Work as a Freelance Artist	Writer Artist Letterer	WizWorld Inc.	2010
The Samaritan Issues 1-7	Writer Letterer	Vantage: Inhouse Productions	2011-2013
Dark Land	Artist	Air Strip 27	2011
Origins Unknown: Breaking the Habit Point of Authority Somewhere I Belong	Writer Letterer	Vantage: Inhouse Productions	2011-2012
The Villain	Writer Letterer	Vantage: Inhouse Productions	2012
8 Mins: An Anthology of the Last Eight Minutes of Earth	Author	Vantage: Inhouse Productions	2012
The Trouble w/Love	Writer Letterer	Vantage: Inhouse Productions	2012

Victor also developed CRE-8 Comics, a teaching aid for schools. It uses comics to encourage literacy, numeracy, vocabulary building, critical analysis, creative writing, decision making, and art – and help the students enjoy learning.

Victor Dandridge tells us more.

SP!: How did Vantage get started?

VD: Vantage: Inhouse is actually my second publishing imprint; it was created after running into some trouble with the similarities between the first name, "WizWorld Inc.," and Wizard World conventions. Ironically though, it wasn't Wizard that gave me any flack, but a few other conventions, refusing me entry because they thought I WAS Wizard. Though WWI was kind of my childhood dream, I recognized that if I didn't change things up, I'd have more doors slammed shut than I ever wanted. Coming up with the new name was a bit of struggle, but with some help, I decided on Vantage:

Inhouse Productions. The 'Vantage' aspect was in reference to a character I had created while writing Hotshot (for Freestyle Komics), that I didn't stay on long enough to introduce (he'll be finding a new home as our flagship character soon)! Since I'd gone full-time with self-publishing, I knew all of my work was going to happen in my home, so that kind of lent itself the 'Inhouse' part. And with my overall plan being to just make whatever floats my fancy, I figured 'Productions' was a wide enough umbrella to cover any and all ways that might take form.

SP!: What's your background?

VD: I'm a LONG-TIME comic book fan/reader, first getting into things with the Death of Superman, X-men #1 and the genesis of Image Comics. That love took me into wanting to create comics of my own, particularly as an artist, so I've got certification as a commercial artist in the state of Ohio (shout out to the teachers at Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center for all the guidance, love and support!). I don't have any degrees from any higher education institutions though—I could never quite sit still long enough in classes to get that cap and gown.

SP!: Can you tell us more about your various titles?

VD: The Samaritan is an interesting take on the Superman-esque archetype: a super-powered, messianic figure - that focuses more on the people being 'saved' than the man who's doing it. It's a very dark urban story with a lot of TEETH to it: heavy language, some graphic violence (not overtly kid-friendly, unless you come from that kind of environment). At any rate, it's about how our hero, Smith, moves into an area and systematically starts cleaning it up. He doesn't wear a costume or have a codename; he just tries to affect REAL change.

Origins Unknown is an anthology series, somewhat in the same vein as Demo (PlanetLars/Vertigo), that has these stand-alone stories of kids discovering some hidden secret or heritage about themselves that's going to change their destiny. Each story in the first volume ends with an abrupt cliffhanger, but it's all in an effort to create a larger interaction with the readership. I'm currently writing the second wave of cliffhangers and once those are finished, I'll open things up to a vote to see which two (out of the six total) will continue on.

The Trouble with Love is certainly my most emotional work to date. It is a challenge to concepts of right and wrong when it comes to fidelity and relationships. It's a different sort of superhero story—not so much a muscles-in-tights kind of thing, but a father sharing a VERY personal story with his son in hopes of repairing their relationship. It's been the best-received thing I've worked on so far, so I'd definitely say it's worth a read (or few).

SPECTRUM is my love letter to Green Lantern. One of my greatest comic book idols has been Darryl Banks (he's a local and one of the first published comic artists I'd ever met) and his work kind of instilled an appreciation for the GLs that was only magnified by the ways Geoff Johns expanded the mythos/universe. There are some cool things behind it that I want to play with, but since I don't think I'll be jumping on any ring-slinging titles anytime soon, this is the best way for me to get that out there.

Grand Commander springs from this urge to do a science-fiction novel— the kind that Frank Frazetta would've painted some AMAZING cover art for. Its roots are rather cheesy (nerdy guy gets phenomenal cosmic powers kinda thing), but I honestly think I can tell some SUPER fun stories with it. I've gone back and forth on whether it'll be a comic or not and think that a few short prose chapters will be coming soon to get a feel for what people think.

8 Mins is my first self-published prose work, a novella of 15 short stories all taking place in the eight minute span from when our sun blows up to when its destructive energies reach Earth. While it sounds a bit nihilistic, the point wasn't oblivion or despair, but honestly challenging us with the question of if the next eight minutes were going to be your last, would you be proud of what you had done? I'm currently working on the second volume, which I hope to have finished and out in the world by April of 2014.

SP!: You do 8-bit/pixel artwork?

VD: I do! And I LOVE it!!! I got started because, though I CAN draw, I've not been the most confident in my art skills and I didn't want to directly compete with some of my friends that I just KNEW would blow me right out of the water! We were all going to be a show, but for the first time, we were NOT working together and I wanted something that was going to stand out and be different. It was a comics and games show, so I thought... hmmmmm... comics + games = 8-bit superheroes! I had planned to do only eight characters, but in three days, I had cranked out a hundred different pieces

(with respect to costume variations and all that). I've been doing it for three years now, and have adopted a wholly original style of creation that I'll be using in more fine-arts ways in 2014.

SP!: Can you tell us more about U Cre-8 Comics?

VD: U Cre-8 Comics is a workbook/programming series I've put together to help kids use comics to get better understanding of education fundamentals. I first showcased it during the 2011 summer reading program for the Columbus Metropolitan Library with the "Character Crafter" workbook, an eight-page booklet that walked you through creating your own character from start to finish. Since then, I've extended it to be an entire programming platform that centres on the Four Cs of 21st Century Education (Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Communication) that educational institutions can customize for their students.

SP!: What reactions have you had from schools with regard to U Cre-8?

VD: It's been overtly positive, though I'm looking to be included in more schools this coming year than I have before. A lot of its use has been in after-school programs in more urban parts of Columbus and I think the educators that have supported it find it refreshing and engaging.

SP!: What reactions have you had from parents and children about U Cre-8?

VD: They LOVE IT! To be honest, I'm almost jealous of EVERY kid that gets to do the U Cre-8 line in school, because it's the kind of stuff I would've LOVED to do at their age. With a lot of the kids I've worked with, they have such a limited idea of comics, so it's been educational not just on a school/classroom level, but in a pop media/subcultural sort of way, that allows them to fully relate to it.

SP!: Which graphic novels, if any, are currently "scholastics-endorsed" and on "accepted reading lists" in the USA? Is there an online list?

VD: I know Jeff Smith's BONE series is on the Scholastics roster and I've seen a few Adventure Time trade paperbacks at the book fairs at my sons' school, but there honestly aren't a lot of books with the Scholastics stamp of approval. Quite a few years back, Wizard Magazine published an article on graphic novels used in higher education classes, but I haven't seen a list like that in AGES and I KNOW there are quite a few books that've come out since then that should/would make the list. (Heck, BONE wasn't even finished back then!) I wish there was a more concerted effort to get a list like that officially made. I've worked with a few local comic shops here in Columbus to come up with an age-appropriate recommended reading list that I can take to the schools. I need to check up on how that's going! LOL!!!

SP!: How does self publishing compare with work-for-hire?

VD: There's an immensity of freedom and an abundance of pressure when you self-publish. I only have one Work-For-Hire credit under my belt (Illustrator for the Dark Land from Airship 27) and, while it was a very wonderful experience, my preference is definitely to be in the driver's chair and to tell the stories I want to tell! Whether you succeed or fail with a self-published piece, I think there's more you can actually gain from it, rather than WFH, which is often trivialized into just being a pay check or a portfolio add-on. As with a lot of self-publishers, our stories are more than just tales to be woven, but something we want to say or do, and the final product is more of a reflection of who we are and what we're about. It's VERY different... I hesitate to say better, because regular pay checks are so damn useful! Lol!

SP!: Did you learn a lot about marketing and promotion from the various companies you worked with?

VD: Tremendously and that's not just from the creative places I've worked. I've worn quite a few job hats over the years and each one has taught me something special and different that I use now: like my work in retail. I don't EVER want to sell you my books. I want to create an experience. A sold book isn't really something you care about, but an experience, you'll cherish—and if you walk away with my book at the end of it, then that book could mean something even more special BECAUSE of that experience. It's a bit of a hippie/free love kinda ideal, but it keeps me from being that guy at shows that hounds you to give his book a chance.

SP!: Will you be self-publishing all your creator-owned comics from now on?

VD: I'm certainly open to being published by someone else, but it's gotta line up right with my wants and needs, both for the story and as a creator. For now, though, I'm solidly aiming to self-publish though; that way the only person I'm waiting on is myself!

SP!: What appearances do you have lined up?

VD: I do A LOT of shows. In 2013, I did 31 comic book-related events and 2014 doesn't seem to be slowing down much. So far, I've confirmed appearances at Emerald City Comic Con, DanCon, C2E2, Lexington Comic Con, Cincinnati Comic Expo, N.E. Geek Expo, and there are a few others I have to get final confirmation on.

SP!: How did you get started in comics?

VD: As a reader, it was the Death of Superman, all the way. I wasn't much of a reader as a kid, but when they announced on the news that Superman was going to die, I was like "I wanna read that!" and my mom JUMPED at it! As an artist, I LOATHE revealing any of my early stuff. It was hot garbage and not even worth the rock I shoved it all under! Writing-wise, though, I cut my teeth on Hotshot (from Freestyle Komics). It was a great learning experience, to see how to mold a story and work with characters, especially ones I hadn't created. Ian did a review of some of the early stuff I did and kinda trashed it— WHICH WAS DEFINITELY WARRANTED! I'm a much better writer now and I think it's necessary to get that kind of feedback if you want to improve.

SP!: Do you think the Internet has made it easier for people to self publish and distribute their self published work?

VD: Absolutely! In the ten years since I started writing, I've seen HUGE advances that the net has provided and it makes it all the more exciting to see how people will continue to evolve and create. I wasn't always a fan of digital comics, but what it provides with instant access is an interesting option, especially considering where comic shops haven't been able to bring in new readers. The internet has been an incredible boon!

SP!: Do you think the number of self-published comics, print-on-demand comics, digital comics and web comics makes it more difficult for individual creators to promote and market their work?

VD: There are certainly a lot more voices in the choir, but that means that you can rest on your laurels and do the same things that have been done for ages! Now, honestly, not every book that's now available is good, but it's kinda our job as creators to showcase how good our books are and why anyone should give them a chance. It's not impossible and- like I said, with the internet opening up so many new venues, it's that much more likely that the innovative creator can do something spectacular!

SP!: How important to do think it is for creators to have their work in bricks-and-mortar shops as well as online?

VD: It's highly important, but requires a lot more understanding. Bricks-and-mortars are where a lot of us got our regular fixes for books and, for that reason alone, we should support them. They were safe havens for our geek and helped a lot of us learn about comic culture and all that. But we've gotta understand the risks that shops take and make our products viable to them. They're not just there to serve us, but require mutual benefit. So, you have to do leg work that can help you find a wholesale price point, maybe offer a promotional item
or two—something that says, "Thanks for your support, now here's some of my own!"

SP!: What projects do you have coming up in the future?

VD: I've got two comic properties that I'm looking to launch in early 2014: WonderCare is an all-ages tale that mashes together the Muppet Babies and Justice League of America. I'm doing that with Justin Castaneda and he's already blown my mind with just the preliminary stuff he's done!

Then there's Ol' Crazy and the 40oz of Death, a 'sploitation-style piece, that features a neighborhood drunk on a quest for revenge after the death of a little girl. Bryan Moss will be handling art duties on that one and it will be a DOOOOOOZIE!

SP!: What are your hobbies?

VD: I love anything that promotes imagination, so comics, movies, cartoons, and games, but honestly, my biggest hobby has got to be my kids. They keep motivated, grounded, and laughing!

Weblinks:

www.vantageinhouse.blogspot.comwww.vipwebcomics.blogspot.com

www.vip8bits.tumblr.com

www.ucre8comics.com

https://www.facebook.com/VantageInhouse?ref=ts&fref=ts

http://indyplanet.com/store/product_info.php?products_id=9194

SNEAK PEEK!

NEWS
VILLAGES AROUND THE GREAT PYRAMIDS *HAVE* BEEN ATTACKED BY SWARMS OF LARGE SCARAB-LIKE *BEETLES.*
CROPS AND DWELLINGS WERE SEEMINGLY DESTROYED AT RANDOM THEN THE SWARMS OF BEETLES *DISAPPEARED* INTO THE DESERT AS QUICKLY AS THEY CAME.
P!CAPITAL stocks on the rise.

THE BODY COUNT NOW STANDS *AT* TWENTY-TWO AND *RISING*...
STRANGE... *THAT* DOESN'T SOUND LIKE *ANY* SPECIES OF SCARAB I KNOW...
CAPITAL stocks on the r
*ISIS**, SCAN ARCHIVES FOR ANY INSTANCES OF *FLESH-EATING* BEETLES...
SCANNING NOW... RECORD FOUND...

...SPECIES DERMESTES MACULATUS... KNOWN AS THE CARPET BEETLE... FEEDS ON ANY ORGANIC MATERIALS...
ANY INSTANCES *OF* HUMAN ATTACKS?
NO KNOWN RECORD... THE SPECIES PREFERS ANIMAL CARCASSES...
LIFE CYCLE LASTS 45 DAYS PER GENERATION... SENSITIVE TO SUNLIGHT...
MAY CONSUME UP TO FOUR KILOS OF FLESH A WEEK PER COLONY.
...BUT HAS BEEN KNOWN TO FEED ON HUMAN CORPSES ON OCCASION.

THE LAST PHARAOH ZEIN

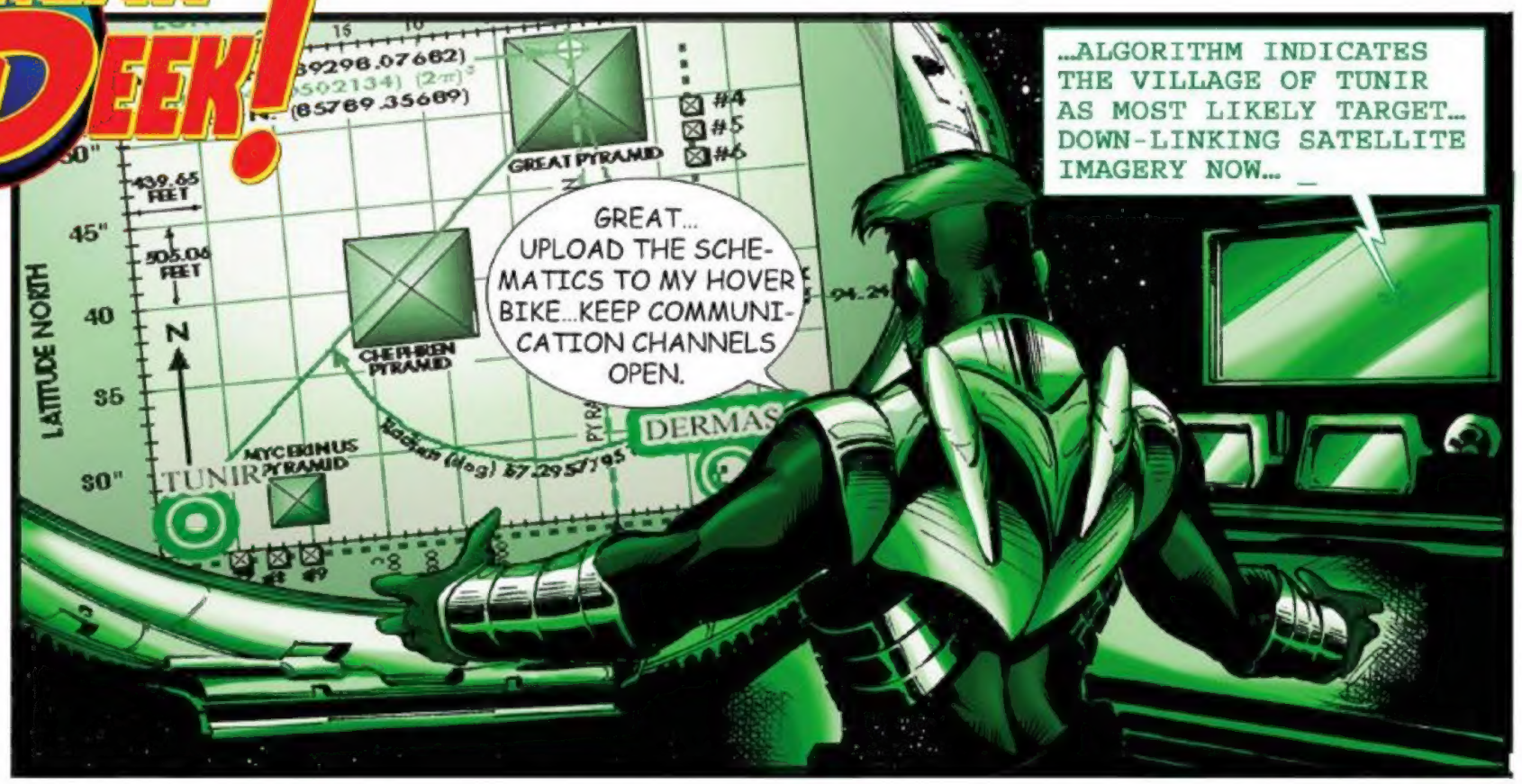
BORN IN 14,000 B.C. TO A POWERFUL KING, ZEIN REPRESENTS AN ANCIENT DYNASTY OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT. HE AND HIS TWELVE SIBLINGS WERE PLACED IN SPECIAL PRESERVATIVE CAPSULES, ALLOWING THEM TO CHEAT DEATH AND ANNIHILATION DURING THE 'GREAT COLLISION'. ON THE 'EVE OF REDAWNING' SOME FIVE THOUSAND YEARS LATER, THE ROYAL SIBLINGS EMERGED WITH MYSTERIOUS PHYSIOLOGICAL ALTERATIONS. BITTER AND ANGRY THEY ALL DISPERSED, ROAMING THE ANCIENT LANDS, LEAVING ZEIN ALL BY HIMSELF. FULL OF DETERMINATION TO FULFIL THE WISHES OF HIS FATHER, AND AIDED BY THE POWERS OF THE JEWEL OF THE RIVER, HE SETS FORTH TO REBUILD THE LOST CIVILIZATION.

I THINK WE'RE DEALING *WITH* SOMETHING *ENTIRELY* NEW HERE...
ISIS, TRIANGULATE THE THREE LOCATIONS THAT *WERE* ATTACKED AND MARK THE MOST PROBABLE POINT OF *NEXT* ATTACK.
PROCESSING...

*ISIS IS THE CODE NAME FOR ZEIN'S ARTIFICIALLY INTELLIGENT SUPER-COMPUTER, PROGRAMMED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE.

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!



DO YOU HAVE A BODY TEMPERATURE READ AT THE SURFACE?
BODY TEMPERATURE IS A STEADY 37°C... BRAINWAVE SCAN REVEALS LOW THETA AND DELTA WAVE ACTIVITY..._
THE VILLAGE IS SLEEPING._
LET'S HOPE IT STAYS THAT WAY!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

SNEAK PEEK!

AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

WAIT A MINUTE, THESE AREN'T ORGANIC AT ALL!
HUNH—?!
HEELP!
SNEAK PEEK!
I'LL HAVE TO DISSECT YOU LATER... FOR NOW, THESE PARTICLE CANONS SHOULD DO THE TRICK!
KRA-BOOM!
BAM!!!
KO-BLAMM!!!
VROOOOOOOOM!
AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY FROM CLOUD 9 COMIX ON IOS, ANDROID AND KINDLE FIRE

A WRITTEN VIEW

By Douglas Owen

The New Year is upon us, and with it comes a new series of The Written View. This year, I will concentrate my column on writing not only about the first draft, but subjacent drafts to tighten up your writing.

Let's push forward on this theme and examine the creativity we need to succeed as writers.

First, understand that once you decide to become a writer, you are a writer. Putting words to paper or word processor is the act of writing and being known as one who records words. Thus, you are a writer. Now, you need to become a successful writer.

The journey is laborious and filled with letdowns and successes. To understand this, just look at the current successful authors of our time (and by 'our time' I mean within the past fifty or so years).

Check out Steven King's book On Writing, if you haven't already. He tells you about his journey trying to publish and supply a good living for his family. Did you know that his novel Carrie almost didn't get written? When the thought of the book entered his mind, Mr. King wrote the shower scene and dismissed the first draft. It was his wife who found it while cleaning. She told him to finish the novel. Lucky for us he did and it launched him on a career that has entertained us with thrills, chills, laughter, regret and triumph. He was 29 when his dream caught up with his ambition.

Let's push forward with this endeavor.

Today the world of publishing has changed. Companies no longer employ an army of editors laboriously correcting spelling and grammar on manuscripts. They expect a writer to take control of their own words and ensure they are perfect. They expect you to make the words flow.

Grammar is another thing which they expect to be perfect. Not in dialogue; if everyone spoke the perfect Queen's English (as the cliché goes), the world would crack in half from the strain. No, most people don't speak proper English at the best of times.

Even when you do a first-person point of view (we'll just call it POV from now on), you have to make sure the narrative is grammatically correct. It will make the difference between a purchased book and one people just shake their heads at and pass over.

And it all begins with the First Draft.

I believe in rewrites. Your first draft, though good for reference, should not be something that you push to publication. It is something you keep behind and look at with fondness. A first draft is your creative juices flowing from your mind to the page. Even this article went through two rewrites in order to polish it and I will say that, unfortunately, it didn't go through enough. Like other writers, I now believe in cutting what is not needed. It tightens the words and makes the manuscript as close to perfect as we can get it.

During the first draft, the object of the writer is to get words down on paper. Write, don't look back. Just pour out your heart and soul to the reader as if it were the last thing you would ever do. Make sure you don't edit it until you are finished. Editing is another stage we will look at later on.

A draft is just that: an unpolished start. We move forward only after it's finished and we can look back at what has been done.

You may be saying, "Hold on, you said spelling and grammar matter." And you are right; they do matter, but not yet. They matter when the editing phase of your writing starts. Right now, you are in the creative phase. So come back to the table and let's work this out a little.

The creative phase is something you need to work through in order to get the story

out. So, how do you do that? It's really easy. Find your idea, plot your theme, and start writing. It could be as easy as setting down an outline, expanding it, and writing. If this works for you, then congratulations, you're a planner; we'll call you the outliner. From start to finish, you have a plan and everything is laid out. The course of your writing will not vary from the map created and all that's left is to put words to page. But maybe you don't know what will happen in the coming pages. Maybe you have a theme, like man sees fish, man catches fish, man loses fish, man catches fish again. Well, you are a pantser. One who writes by the seat of their pants. Hold on, because for you, the ride is a wild one.

Your objective is to get words on the page, whichever way you can or plan on doing it; just get the words down. This is called the first draft and it is the subject of workshops I teach here in Canada.

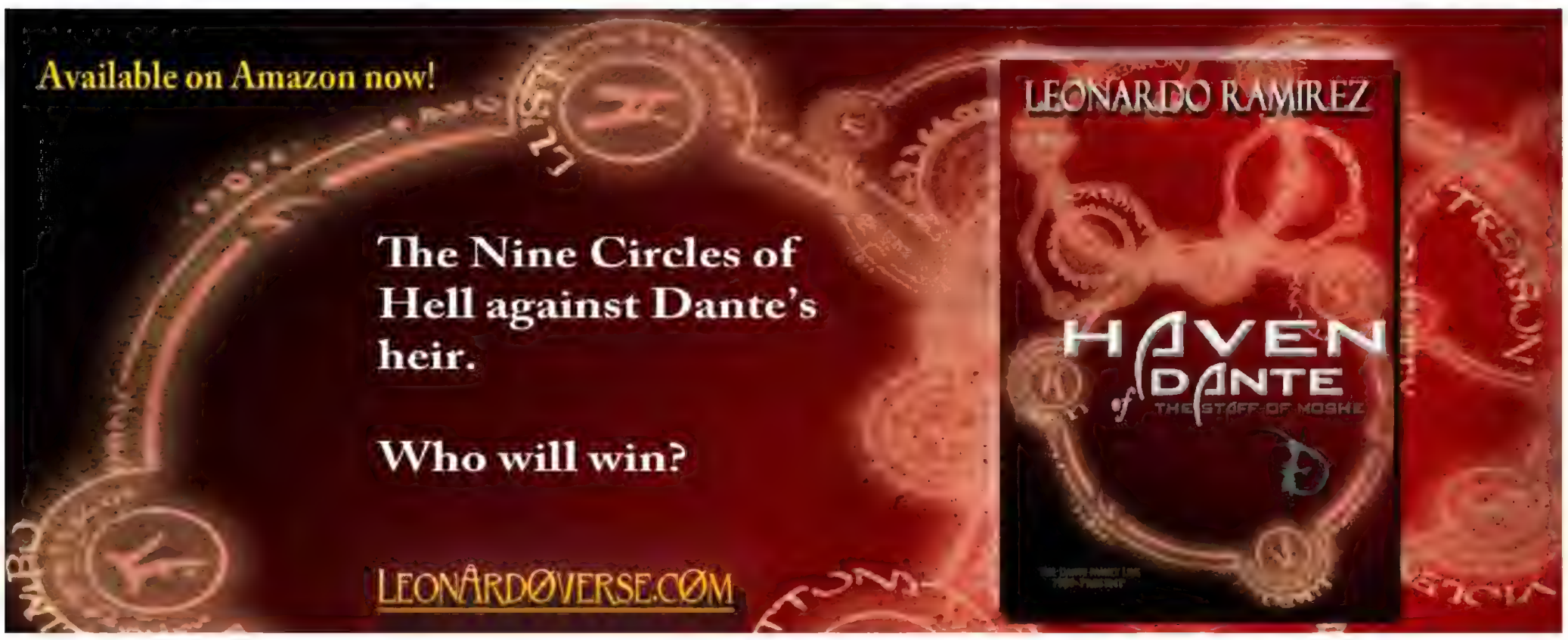
Find a comfortable place in your home or office. Play some music or put on white noise ear phones. Tell your wife/husband/children that you are at work and should not be disturbed for at least an hour. This will seclude you and at least one thousand words will be forthcoming.

Okay, let's get you off the floor. Yes, I said one thousand words. When I was young, that would have been at least five hand-printed pages to give to the teacher (we didn't have computers when I was young; well, not computers in the schools or at home, anyways). It may sound hard, but at this point, I have been writing this article for just under an hour, and the word count right here is at 958 words. So, yes, you can do it.

Don't stop writing because you hit one thousand words, either. Keep going until the need to stop overpowers you. It could be due to a bathroom break or a need to eat or drink something. You could also have finished a very emotional section of the writing and need to recharge. Regardless of why, take the time and recharge. Come back the next day and start writing again.

Once you start yourself down this path, you'll find your writing tightening up automatically. Ideas stay clearer in your mind. Timelines are no longer a struggle. And your POV is tight (never perfect, just tight). Remember to save your work in a folder/directory entitled "First Draft". It will allow you to keep things separate from your finished work and remind you that a writer's job is never finished.

That, my dear readers, is how you start the journey of becoming a writer. Create your first draft.



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By Max West - visit sunnyvillestories.com today!

THE MAN AND THE MOONCHILD: AN INTERVIEW WITH NICK CUTI

By Ellen Fleischer

Nicola Cuti has had a varied career. He has written, drawn, and edited comics, both his own properties and those belonging to the likes of Charlton, DC, Marvel, and Warren. He has written novels and screenplays, designed animation backgrounds, and illustrated magazines. He is, perhaps, best known for being the creator of Moonchild and co-creator (with Joe Staton) of E-Man. Nick was happy to talk to SP! about his experience with self-publishing, his past and current projects, and about what's coming up on his horizon.

SP!: What first sparked your interest in comic books?

NC: The earliest comic book which made an impression on me was the Classic Illustrated version of H.G. Wells' "The Time Machine". I was twelve years old and the artwork and story just blew my mind. From there, I searched the racks for anything science fiction: "Captain Video," "Buck Rogers," the EC comic line if sci-fi comics. Anything. But what so attracted me to the time machine story was that a person could build a time machine in his basement. It would take too much to build a rocket capable of taking a human to the Moon or Mars but a time machine? That could work and what an adventure.

SP!: You've worn several hats over the course of your career: artist, writer, editor, film producer… how and where did you learn your crafts?

NC: I just picked them up along the way. I did go to college, but it was for a liberal arts course. I wrote my first story in 1968 and sent it in to "Creepy" magazine on a lark. They printed it and I was hooked. I used to go to comic book conventions and met my mentor Wallace Wood at one of them. Since we lived close to one another, he hired me as his assistant, so I learned art. From there, I accepted jobs at various comic book companies on staff and learned the art of editing. Then I went to Hollywood and worked in animation for various studios like Disney, Universal, and Sony. Working for the studios sparked an interest in live action. Now I produce indie movies, such as my latest, Moonie and the Spider Queen.

SP!: Do you have a favorite production role? (If so, which, and why?)

NC: I am, by nature, a creator and so I have three roles which allow my creativity to flourish. The first is that of a writer. It all begins with a story and the writer tells the story before anything else can happen. The second role is that of the producer, because the producer gathers and guides the talent which will bring the story to life. The third most important role is that of editor, who tells the final story based on what he's given by the producer and the director.

SP!: Now, your first sold story was "Grub." What was the inspiration behind that one?

NC: While in the service, I was reading a "Creepy" comic book and decided I could write a story as good as any in the magazine. Since I loved science fiction, especially the science fiction art of Wally Wood, I wanted to write a story in that genre and style. I even hoped that Wally Wood might be given the story to illustrate. Instead, the story went to newcomer, Tom Sutton. When I saw his artwork, I was overjoyed. His style was different than Wood's, but the flavor was there: the complex starship interiors, the monsters, the sexy women… it was all there. Sutton had his own style, but he was every bit as fascinating as Wood.

SP!: Moving on to Moonchild, was there a particular inspiration behind her creation?

NC: Frustration was the inspiration. I had read an article about a sexy sci-fi heroine called Barbarella, but there weren't any pictures in the article. I pictured her looking like Playboy's Little Annie Fanny. One "Annie" episode actually had her dressed as a Flash Gordon-ish space heroine. When I finally saw the Barbarella strip, I was disappointed to see what a skinny gal she was, so I decided to create my own voluptuous space heroine

and that's how Moonchild, later renamed Moonie, came about.

SP!: How has the character grown since her inception?

NC: She has grown quite a bit since my first self published "Moonchild Comics". She started out as a crudely-drawn, three-heads-tall space gal without any back story. Since her head was so large, I had to get rid of her space helmet, or else there wouldn't have been room for anyone else in the panels. I remembered a story from my childhood about Water babies who could live underwater, so I created the Starbabes—humanoid creatures who could live in outer space—with Moonie as the first and most dynamic Starbabe. Ed Vick of MU comics saw some of Moonie's published work and asked me to do a three-issue mini-series. This series, later collected into a graphic novel, became the definitive Moonie and it's still on sale on Amazon.com under the title Moonie vs Phobia, the Spider Queen. I wrote, penciled, and edited it with inks by another Wood fan, Dave Simons.

SP!: She's moved on to other media, too, including AudioDrop, film, and novels. What can you tell us about those versions?

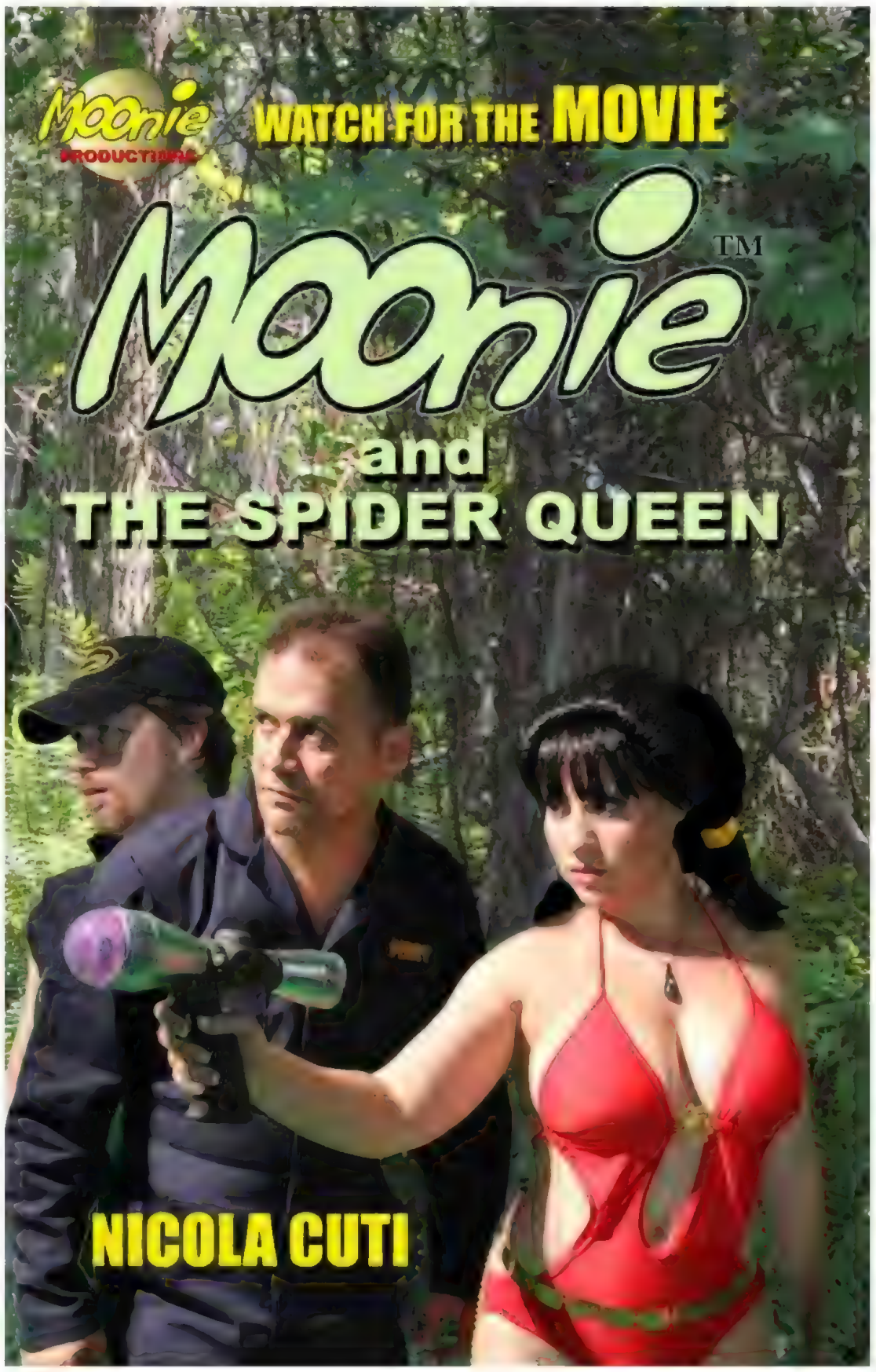
NC: As a storyteller, I'm always looking for new ways to tell stories. When Eric Erickson advertised for stories for his audio drop company, I sent him Moonie and it turned out he was familiar with the character. He made an audio version of the graphic novel, calling it "Moonie, the Complete AudioDrop Series". At almost the same time, I decided it was time for a Moonie movie. My friend Bill Black, a movie-maker himself, suggested doing the movie in episodes. I sold every bit of comic and sci-fi memorabilia I owned and, with the help of fundraising from IndieGoGo, I was able to raise $5,000. I made the movie with Nikoma DeMitro as Moonie and it's on sale on Amazon.com as Moonie and the Spider Queen, Episode One.

SP!: What drew you to self-publishing?

NC: FREEDOM!!! I loved working for the big companies like DC Comics, Charlton, Warren, and Marvel, but there were always guidelines to follow and I had to create stories around their characters. With self-publishing, I could do whatever I wanted to do. The distribution was a joke compared to the distribution of the big guys, but the freedom to write and draw whatever I wanted to write was worth it.

SP!: Did you find it difficult to make the switch between working for other companies, such as DC and Charlton, and publishing your own?

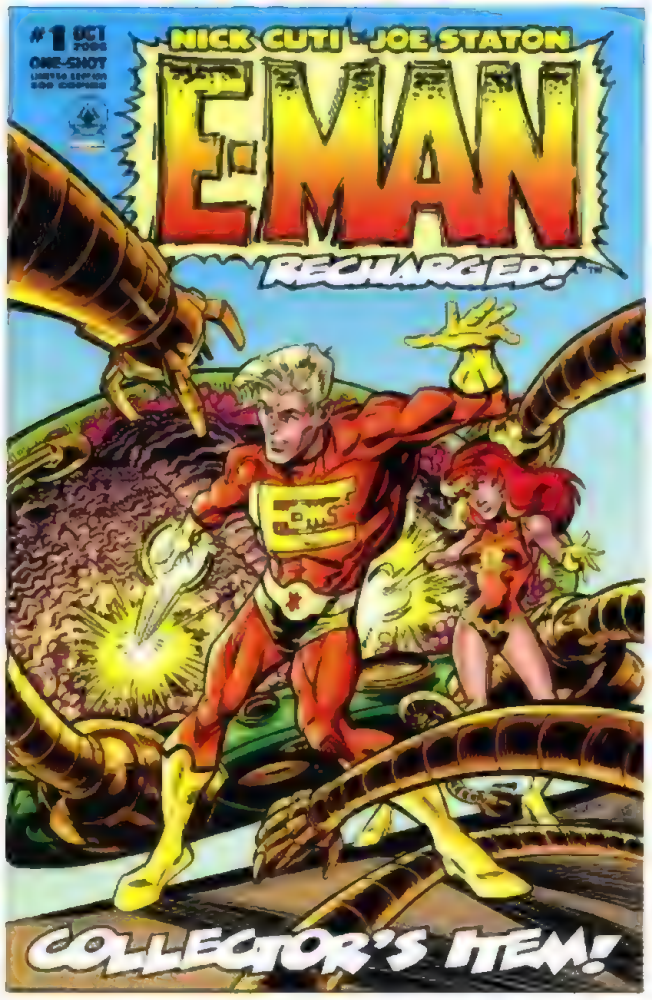
NC: Not really. I had always been writing and publishing my own stories, even while I worked for the big companies. I especially enjoyed writing for anthologies where I didn't have a character to write for. With characters, you have a history, mannerisms, and outcome to worry about. With your own characters, the sky's the limit. You can even kill them off. Now that I'm retired, I can focus on only what interests me and that is Moonie.

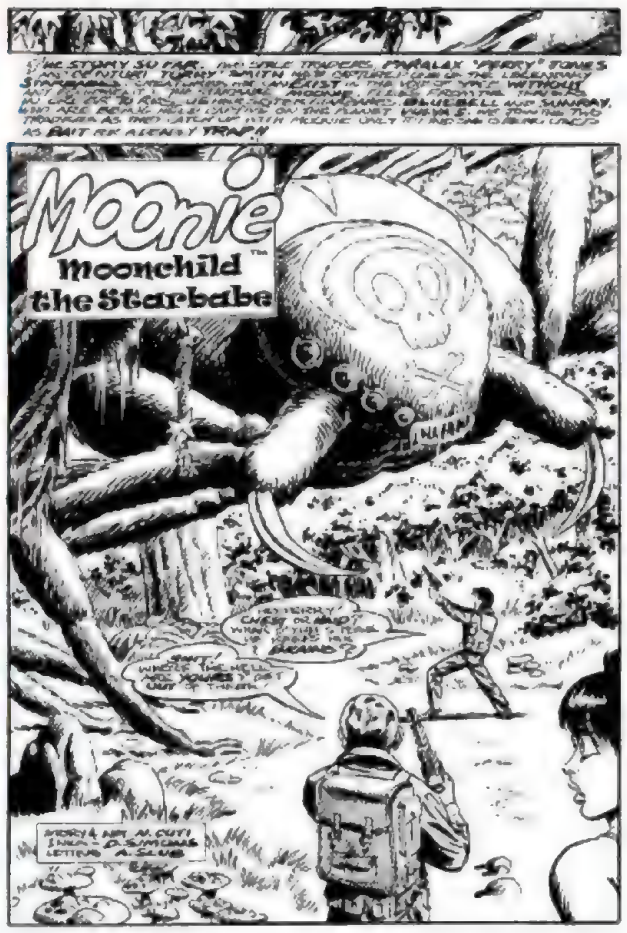


SP!: What would you say has gotten easier about self-publishing (both for you personally and in general)? Harder?

NC: When I first began working in self-publishing, I used a typewriter and did all drawings by hand. I still draw by hand, but the word processor makes writing so much easier, incredibly easier. I can move words or paragraphs with ease and not worry about having to rewrite an entire story or novel, because I've left out important information. And then there's spell check. Also, there are online companies who will publish your work for free or for a small fee. It beats working with printers by a mile. As for being harder, I don't see how it's harder, only easier and better.

SP!: Is there any advice that you wish you'd been given when you were just starting out?





NC: Yeah, don't even consider doing this unless you are willing to work at it full time and every day and willing not to make much money at it. Those who do it for a lark never go far. You have to be obsessed or don't even try.

SP!: You now produce indie films. How difficult was it to make the transition from print to movies?

NC: Not really difficult at all. All media involves storytelling. If you can tell a good story in print, you can do the same in movies. The major difference is, in print you can do it all except for the printing itself. In movies, you need a lot of good talent, cast and crew, to tell your story.

SP!: Were there any challenges (foreseen or unforeseen) that you'd like to share with us?

NC: Money is the greatest challenge. You need funding to get anything out there by yourself. If you work for the big companies, they will pay you for your work, but if you work for yourself, then you are going to be doing the paying and it's always more expensive than you think.

SP!: Can you tell us a bit about the films that you've written and/or produced, thus far?

NC: I think my early films had good ideas, but the execution was amateurish. Tagged is a story about a girl obsessed with the game of Laser Tag. Lost in Transit is about a little girl who becomes lost in space while teleporting between planets. The Lady Without Substance concerns a woman who appears to a reporter/private eye—and only to him—because she literally lives in his brain. Shock House follows ghost hunters investigating a house where no one who enters is ever seen again. Captain Cosmos is a satire on space opera. Moonie and the Spider Queen is, by far, my best movie and I am so very anxious to complete the trilogy.

SP!: What's next on the horizon for you?

NC: Besides more Moonie movies and novels, we are trying to head into a brand new direction. Nikoma DeMitro (Moonie), noticed at conventions we had Captain Cosmos for boys, Moonie for adults, but nothing for girls. She asked me if I could come up with something girls could relate to and so I created Starflake. Like Moonie, Starflake is a Starbabe but she is a teen. Unlike Moonie, her stories are romantic, yet not sexy. Her first novel, Starflake on Thrill World will be out soon and we'll see how it goes.

SP!: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention that we haven't touched on, yet?

NC: Gee, you've been pretty thorough with your questions. I think we've covered things very well.

SP!: How can folks keep up with you and your projects?

NC: Try:

MoonieAndTheSpiderQueen.com

https://www.facebook.com/ (Facebook)

Nick Cuti (Wikipedia)

Or just plug "Moonie and the Spider Queen" in your search engine.

She's also on (YouTube) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnl3v6zrNO0&feature=c4-overview&list=UUG_U_fm71M4Rm9Up-TvgqyPw and (Vimeo) http://vimeo.com/57801633.

Also look for more Moonie novels and the movie on (Amazon.com) http://www.amazon.com/Moonie-Spider-Queen-Nikoma-DeMitro/dp/B00DVTAUPM.

Borock Rock Smasher looked towards the cavern ceiling and cringed. He knew that sound.

"Everyone, stop!" he called out, holding up his hands.

"What!" Tingel Iron Hunter looked over, his pick hovering above his head in mid-swing.

"Don't you hear it? They're drilling again." Borock held his hand to his ear, straining to locate exactly where the sound was coming from.

"You're daft. We're five hundred pick handles down. They've yet to be able to drill this far." Tingel brought his pick down on the vein of quartz, looking for the yellow glint of gold he knew should be there. "Anyways, I'm tired of hidin' from them."

"The Elves thought the same thing. Where are they now?"

Tingel scowled. "Elves. They refused to hide right, staying in the forests instead of getting underground like any reasonable being would." He brushed the point of his pickaxe. "They said, 'We'll hide in the trees, they'll never cut them down'. But what did the men

do?" Tingel spat. "Cut down the trees. They're too busy killin' the top to go after Earth Blood down here. Anyways, there's no Earth Blood in this area." He hefted his pick. "Closest is hundreds of pick handles away."

"I'm still calling an Elder." Borock put down his hammer and grabbed an apprentice by the scruff of the neck. "Look," he said, his beard spilling rock dust as he spoke. "Get ya ass down to the temple and tell Elder Dorage Gold Molder to get his beardless face over here."

The apprentice gulped at the insult, but bobbed his head in respect before running off to fetch the Elder.

"Ya really think that's gonna help? Insulting the Father like that?" Tingel grinned, his pick glancing off the quartz to expose the yellow he loved. "Found ya, bugger. Inta the bag ya go." He reached down and started to scoop the ore into a bag.

Borock moved about the cavern, pressing his ear to the rock face and listening.

"My face is not beardless, Borock." The voice echoed off the walls of the cavern and a wide, stout Elder entered the work area. A hood covered his face and the hem of the robe he wore brushed against the floor. A great beard hung down from the shadows to the sash around the wearer's waist, with gold and silver threads woven in it.

"They're digging again." Borock pointed to the ceiling of the cavern. "I hear 'em gettin' closer."

The Elder raised his head towards the ceiling and Borock saw the old, wizened face full of wrinkles frown in disgust. "Humans. Will they ever stop seeking the blood of the Earth?"

"When the drill gets down here we should smash it." Tingel tied his bag and hefted it over his shoulder. "That way we can show 'em it'll cost 'em for digging into our realm."

The Elder muttered in the ancient tongue, reaching his hands to the ceiling as they started to glow with power. "No, not above us." He moved to the wall and felt along the craggy face, fingers caressing the rock lovingly. "Here. They are using the light pipe to find it." His hands pulsed with the energy of his magic. "I would say about five pick handles in. Borock, we need to get there before it finishes. We have found a channel of Earth Blood one hundred pick handles below and it seems they have also."

"I haven't smelled anything," Borock said, shaking his head.

"Your senses have dulled with your time away from the Heart of the Earth. Our magic has found the Earth blood, and it seems the human's science has also found it." The Elder spat as he said the word science. "But instead of diverting the blood, they intend to pull it to the surface."

Tingel dropped his pick in shock and swore under his breath. "Do they eat the stuff?" He bent and picked up his pick.

"No," said the Elder. "They use it to power the machines."

"Which ones? All we see are the light drills." Borock scratched at his chin through the mass of whiskers adorning it. "I'm with Tingel on this one, I say we smash it."

"No," said the Elder, his hands pulsing with magic. "I have a better idea. I'll use the magic of the Earth to melt the metal of the drill. Maybe they'll think they found liquid rock and end their drilling." Ancient words erupted from his mouth and the Elder stepped back from the wall, his hands pointing to the rock. Blue flame erupted from his fingers and disappeared into the rock. He stood there for ten seconds, as the power of the Earth pulsed through him and into the cavern wall. Then, in a wink, the flame ended and the cavern darkened. "It is done."

"Shut it down!" screamed Jeff. "We hit another lava vein." His hand slapped against the side of the hover drill in disgust. "I'll never make the money back from buying you. Three drill sites and three melted drills." He jumped down from the platform to the main deck.

"No oil?" Brad asked.

"No oil."

Brad started to cry.

"Look, Brad, I can't advance you any more money. I'm busted. We may be able to get enough money together for one more survey, but that's it. If we don't hit oil soon, we might as well volunteer for the Space Marines; at least they get fed."

"And shot at. The war with the colonies on Mars is getting out of hand. What are we supposed to do till then?"

Jeff punched in the commands on the hover drill's control console. The platform lurched into the air and started to move south. "Pray we stop hitting lava, Brad. Pray we stop hitting lava."

EARTH BLOOD

DOUGLAS OWEN

**Written by Douglas Owen and published through Science Fiction and Fantasy Publications,
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THREE PEOPLE NOT TO BE AT A CONVENTION

By: Jennifer Vanderbeek

Conventions are one of the best ways for many independent creators to get their work into the hands of would-be fans. And while a single convention's sales aren't the only measure of a successful outing, they often make the difference between being able to make it to the next convention or not. When I started tabling at shows, I was lucky to make enough to cover the gas money to get there, much less make back the table fee. These days, the situation is vastly different; I've been lucky to move quite a number of books at each show—and that's saying something, as no one goes to a comics convention expecting to buy a cookbook!

Every creator is going to need to find out exactly their own best approach to selling at shows, but I've noticed three very common habits among highly gifted artists and writers that work against their efforts, right there at the table! I've witnessed these self-same creators get into a funk over low sales, bad-mouth the convention organizers for the same, or even pack up early and leave an empty table in the middle of the vendor floor. Certainly not the way to increase your sales.

The Artist at Work

Commissions can be lucrative if you have the capacity for them, but while your head is down over the sketch book, many patrons are afraid to interrupt. If they are already fans, they may wait for an opening, but for those unfamiliar with your work, eye contact and a welcoming expression are key to getting a fan-to-be to stop. At the very least, looking up quite often or angling your drawing surface so that you can easily glance above it are ways to fill commissions without limiting your availability.

One of the best ways I've seen this handled was by the addition of a helper (or three)

to your standard booth set-up. The artist of the Good Ship Sappho webcomic (http://goodshipsappho.tumblr.com/DaughtersofanIndustrialEra) brings along costumed associates to grab the attentions of passers-by and make sales of non-custom goods, while she works almost constantly on commissions. But remember, the best person to sell your work is you, so don't depend exclusively on an assistant.

The Statue

Whereas the artist at work appears unapproachable, the statue blends into the background and could easily be confused for a prop instead of a person.

We were sitting next to an artist at our last convention who sat stock still, looked more or less straight ahead, and just waited for people to walk up and engage him in conversation. His work was gorgeous, he worked with popular themes, but midway through the three-day convention, he packed up and went home, citing no sales.

While there is definite merit in not being overly forward and scaring away people from the table, this opposite end of the spectrum errs too far to the other side. I've found that standing whenever possible puts me on eye-level with con-goers, making it easier to get

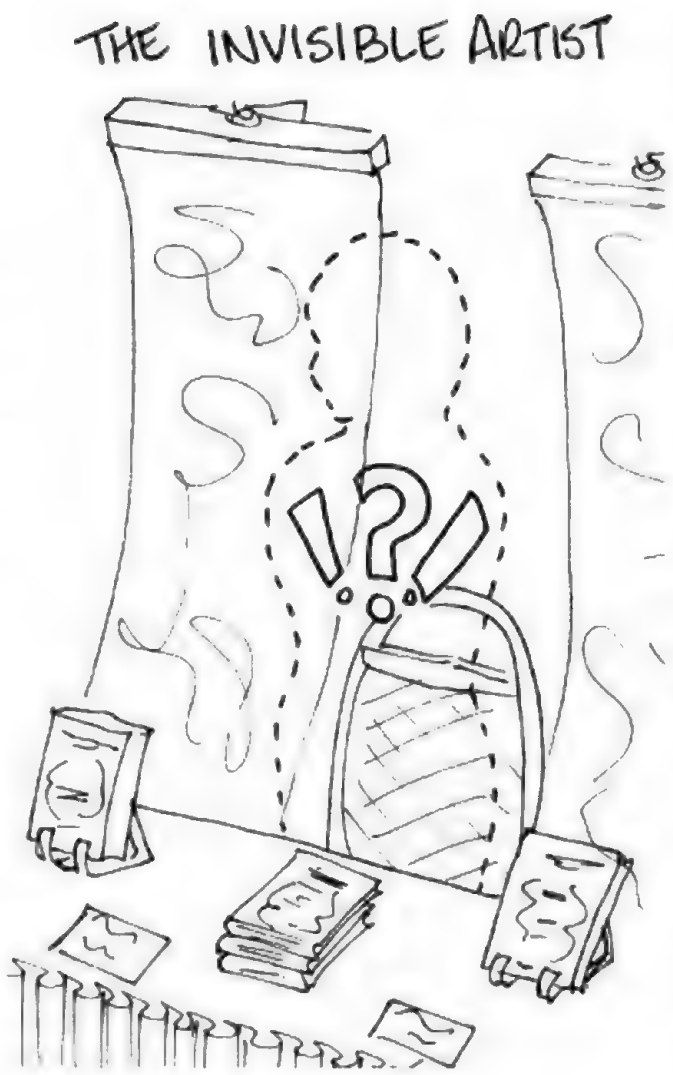
people's attention without being too pushy about it. Showing other signs of animation and obviously enjoying your day at the show will draw people to you and your table. You don't want to take the focus away from your work, of course, but a bit of amplification never hurts.

The Invisible Artist

This is the most puzzling of the habits observed: the creator who's never there.

It's frequently a requirement—if you are a guest of the convention—that you participate in various panels or meet-and-greets. Even if it's not a requirement, it's still a wonderful way to introduce yourself and your work to a large group of people all at once. These table absences are unavoidable, though having the aforementioned assistant can help minimize any missed sales.

Aside from this sort of working absence, where does the creator need to be? At their table, hopefully making sales. Instead, I often see tables unmanned for several hours at a stretch, while I spot the missing artist at someone else's table. There's a camaraderie



that builds the more shows you attend, and it's nice to see familiar faces, but every time you step away from your own space to visit, not only are you missing out on your own sales, you're tying up another creator's attention and possibly costing them sales as well.

As the 2014 convention seasons gears up and you make your plans, keep these examples in mind of who not to be. And if sales aren't your goal, save your money on that vendor table and just go to the convention as a regular attendee—you'll have much more fun and a lot less gear to carry!

Jennifer Vanderbeek (nee Walker) is the author and illustrator behind What to Feed Your Raiding Party, the comic book cookbook for gamers. She works and writes from her home in Tallahassee, Florida.

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SCREAMIN' SKULL PRESS

An Interview with Tony and Nicole Nessca

By: Mark Turner

SP!: Screamin' Skull Press is the publishing company run by the both of you (Tony and Nicole), yet you both write your novels separately. How would you say your styles differ? Is it a matter of topics that interest you, etc? Have you ever considered writing together?

NN: Although we run the publishing company together, we, in my opinion, differ on how we approach writing. Specifically, style. I write mostly poetry and short bursts of prose, while Tony writes novellas and poetry. Hence, I attempt to take an idea or topic and go straight for the readers' emotions or thoughts. Tony will take the same topic (sometimes) and tell a story. I have a tendency to be quite cathartic in all of my writing. Strange, but true.

Although Tony and I have never collaborated on a book together, we have done so on a couple of other projects, including a short screenplay and, most recently, have begun a small music project together. In my opinion, I'm not sure that writing a book or poetry together is a far-off idea, just something we have not done before.

TN: Well, I think the main difference is that Nicole writes poetry, mainly—as in, she goes more for a statement in a piece, a feeling or an idea she's trying to convey to herself and the reader. I've written novels as well as poems, so I'm trying to go more for the "story" of the piece, not necessarily the "feeling" as Nicole might. However, our writing is similar in execution, as in we both write free-flow, spontaneous prose and poetry, free of conventional literary trappings.

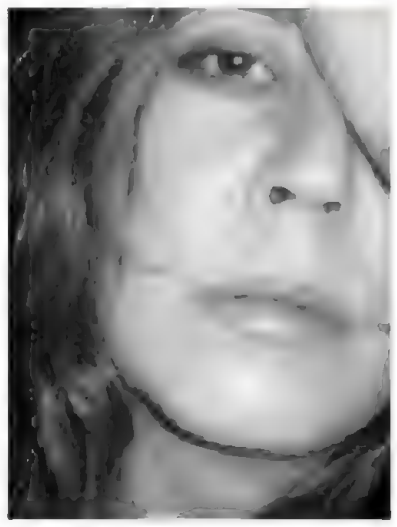
We actually have a completed screenplay for a film that we've collaborated on and tried to shop around for a few years now—had a bit of interest in it as well, but nothing was finalized. We've also played around with the idea of working on a graphic novel together.

SP!: Stylistically, how would you describe your writing voice? Who would you say some of your influences are?

TN: A reader of mine, several years ago, called my poetry "word music," and it has stuck in my mind ever since… That is the best definition of my writing: it's a spontaneous, almost stream-of-consciousness style, where rhythm and beat are just as important as story, where the words flow down the page like an instrument being played, like a waterfall. Sentences and paragraphs can go on for pages, never cluttered or sloppy, mind you, just musical. Hence the term "Word Music"… It's important to me that I don't write "normally"…Whenever you give me flat, conventional, sentence structure, you lose me…

My influences range from Henry Miller (my favorite writer), to Jack Kerouac, Aldous Huxley, D.H. Lawrence, Charles Bukowski, and Raymond Carver, to my musical heroes Lou Reed, Tom Waits, Pete Townsend, Frank Black, Joe Strummer, John Lennon, etc…

Tony Nessca



Nicole Nessca

NN: Ah, the influence question. Ha ha. I have always found this to be one of the hardest questions to answer. My influences range from Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, my grandmother, a co-worker, etc. I'm kind of eclectic in that I am a watcher and observer of life. So, a ride on the bus can turn into a short piece of prose or an epic poem. But, for the sake of answering the question and not running on for paragraphs, I'd have to say that most of my major influences come from song writers. The idea of telling a story in such a short amount of time is absolutely amazing to me. The talent it takes to engage someone and take them down the same road, holding them captive the whole way and wanting to know what happens next… that's what I call talent, nay, magic.

As I have already mentioned, I am pretty cathartic in my writing, painting, etc. I have a tendency to write in the narrative. I'm not sure why or how that came to be, other than, it just being a natural progression in my writing. If I do write from another point of view (story telling) I am always aware of trying to stay gender neutral, or rather neutral, in that I am hoping that, when the work is read, the reader is able to glean a small sense of "oh yeah, I get it." Or "I know exactly what you mean." A moment of understanding.

SP!: What would you each say is your favorite work of the other, to date? What is it about that particular piece that you find resonates

for you?

NN: In the beginning of Tony's and my relationship, we were corresponding long-distance and one of the first books I had ever read of his was LA GIOCONDA. I remember finding it in my mailbox one day, after work. I think it is my favorite, because it was sent to me and hand-picked for me to read first. (So, for sentimental reasons) I also found a melancholy happiness in the book that spoke to me on a personal level. The book was so well-written and the story was one that most people have experienced or have known someone who has gone through some of the same things. Universal understanding. (wink) Well-written universal understanding.

TN: Nicole's favorite book of mine is CANNED, which is a short work of poetry and prose. I was blown away by its directness and no bullshit-tell-it-as-is style… which was actually interspersed with her classic free-flow spontaneous style, without affecting the rhythm and "sound" of the writing at all, it came across as seamless. It's quite a powerful piece….

SP!: What is currently in the works for Screamin' Skull Press?

NN: Currently, Tony and I are working on a music project together and each of us has another book in the works, too.

SP!: Where did the name for your publishing company come from? If Screamin' Skull Press were to be given a title for what it is known for, what would that title be and why?

NN: I'm not sure how to answer this question. I, admittedly, would have to defer to Tony for this one.

TN: We are both working on new books of prose and poetry, and are also planning a virtual book tour to try and generate some buzz about our stuff and Screamin' Skull Press in general… It should take place sometime in the new year, and if it goes well, we will definitely do more of them. Of course, as soon as the first new book is completed, there will be a book launching at a local bookstore here in Winnipeg, which we've done before and is always fun. Screamin' Skull Press is a name I came up with in 1994 that I thought sounded rock and roll cool to publish my own work… but my books started getting across to a small crowd and I started taking it more seriously, talking to distributors, indie promoters, that kind of stuff… then Nicole came into the picture and that completed the puzzle… We plan on hopefully putting out some music under the Screamin' Skull banner, as well as graphic novels, and whatever else…

Screamin' Skull Press is a rebel press, at core similar to what writers like Henry Miller and Anais Nin might have published, or the original Beats from the 40s and 50s, though Nicole and I have our own very original and distinct styles. It is rebellious literature at a time, in my opinion, where artistic rebellion is desperately needed and fearless artists must come to the forefront.

SP!: As independent publishers, what do you feel are some of the greatest challenges you face? What is it about independent publishing that appeals to the both of you the most?

TN: As an indie writer/publisher, the avenues of recognition are few... Even with the internet, to get an indie book in bookstores, to get reviews, to get any kind of national or international professional distribution, is next to impossible… That damn stigma attached to indie writers is the weakness… "Professionally" published writers are NOT better writers, they're just more saleable to the masses… I hope the world in general will one day catch up to this concept…

The appeal of indie publishing is the complete freedom to make art without the interference of some editor who doesn't have any understanding of what you are trying to do artistically, but only cares about the commercial appeal of your work and how the masses will take it… To be an artist, a proper artist, you have to have the freedom to be yourself and to create work that reflects that individuality… if it sells, then that is fantastic… if it doesn't, then feel proud that you did it your way, and move on to the next project…

NN: The greatest challenge to independent publishing would be marketing. Without the corporate money machine backing you, one is forced to spend a ton of time online searching and being your own manager/agent. Not complaining, but it is a job in and of itself. Although it is a job, it is a freeing one! Independent publishers have more freedom to choose how they are being represented, their content, packaging, peers, etc. The freedom of working for yourself and for others like yourself, spreading the word of self and the words of others that may never have been discovered. Very freeing.

SP!: Where can interested readers find your work?

TN: & NN: You can find our books at our main page:

http://screamingskullpress.blogspot.ca/

or at Amazon, ITunes, Lulu, and a million other online places… Just do a Google search on either one of us. You can also order our books from any bookstore or library in the world.

POZITIVE THINKING

An Interview with Winston Blakely

By Ellen Fleischer

Winston Blakely is an artist, illustrator, and storyteller. He has taught art appreciation in inner city schools and lectured on comic book history and pop culture. He is the creator of the graphic novel Little Miss Strange and the Immortal Fantasy anthology. This month, he took time out from his busy schedule to talk to SP! about his background, works, and experience.

SP: How did you get into art? Was this something that you always saw yourself doing?

WB: As a child, I saw art as more than a medium of quick expression in a classroom full of students. My greatest epiphany came when I saw my father draw something on a piece of paper in the kitchen. It was then that I knew I wanted to be an artist for life… I can still hear the words in my head: "That's what I want to do… Take a two dimensional surface and make it 3D on paper."

Of course, this was not an easy choice, as I soon found out that being a professional artist takes time and lots of training. Why, it's almost similar to seeking a career as a doctor or lawyer; you will be studying for ten to fifteen years just to learn your craft. Most of what an illustrator does is observation and memory, combined with imagination, and coupled with a keen sense of storytelling.

I consider storytelling the strongest point in my artistry, for without that, you really can't become a good artist. The other stuff, anatomy and perspective, will come as you develop your skills.

SP!: Who would you say have been your biggest influences—not necessarily with regard to your craft?

WB: As I said before, my father influenced me a lot in my early training as an artist. He began to nurture my desire to become an artist, for you see, I have always been both a comic book artist and a fine arts painter or illustrator.

My father introduced me to all kinds of people in the commercial art world. He even arranged certain one-man art exhibitions for me, in which I did sell my paintings at an early age.

Now, comic books influence me in a way that refers back to storytelling. Personally, I feel that the early 60s was the best time for sequential panel art, since that was like the heyday of Marvel Comics and DC comics was not too far behind. Many comic lovers have told me that when Jack "King" Kirby died, he took the comic industry with him. Sometimes, I can feel that vibe that somehow, this seems true (regardless of the wonderful comics available, now). The energy and love for the medium was unsurpassed back then. I do remember gravitating to Steve Ditko, the artist known for Spider- Man and Doctor Strange. His storytelling and pathos in both series is amazing. He made them real for me. And that seems to be what it's all about in our imaginations… don't you think?

SP!: You've done a lot to promote art within your community as well. What kind of activities are you involved in when you aren't creating?

WB: It is true that I am a former school teacher and yes, I did teach art in the public schools for a while. There was even a city-wide art show in which some of my students' work was featured in the New York City Board of Education's main display room.

After school art programs was something that I also dabbled in on several occasions with an organization called The Jackie Robinson Center for Physical Culture. This Brooklyn-based program helped me and other community activists reach out to inner city children and young adults to broaden the scope of their surroundings and environment.

I've even done a lecture at Four Towns College on comics, art, and mythology and how they all relate together. My current lecture series is about the extreme admiration for comics and how it has influenced the current landscape of this country's ever-changing pop culture.

Yet, I find myself having guilty pleasures like everyone else, like watching some of my favorite shows on network television, cable TV, or even BBC America.

SP!: What do you like most about working with kids? Adults?

WB: Most children are enthusiastic about art. As stated before, it's a quick expression of thoughts and freedom, a chance to let loose, if you will. Of course, you have to put up with the erratic behavior of students who are troubled and need to express themselves by disrupting the class, since art is taken for granted and considered an elective in most school curricula, hence the romper room attitude. But there will always be those who will shine and remind you of yourself and how art is the thing that drives you.

Incidentally, adults are just as annoying as kids in these classes. A lot of this arsenide behavior stems from childhood and can lead to some attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. But serious art students who are adults do enjoy experiencing a session of artistry for educational, creative, and recreational purposes.

SP!: What drew you to self-publishing?

WB: Frustration and rejection, although not necessarily in that order. Self- Publishing represents freedom and not kowtowing to the mass market media of cash cows. And yes, the mainstream comic industry is full of that lingering stigma and servitude.

Creating your own heroes and characters is a wonderful thing, giving you a sense of great achievement and satisfaction. Homage also comes to thought in many ways, as a reflection or fondness for the medium of storytelling. Plus, don't forget you can set your own deadlines and have characters do what you want them to... all the while remembering that this is your imagination at work.

SP!: Was it difficult to make the transition from working for companies such as Valiant and Millennium to being your own boss?

WB: Not, at all. Valiant Comics gave me a chance to see corporate America at work. Every artist has his own horror stories about working in the industry and I have mine. It was a dream come true, but not without some thorns attached to it.

Millennium Publishing was the early beginning of self- publishing for me. It was the first and short-lived home for Little Miss Strange, plus it caused me to realize to how Diamond Distributors operated.

Yet, self-publishing can have it draw backs. Think of it this way. Who is going to pay you for characters that are not established in the mainstream industry? This has to be a labor of love or else it won't work. Dedication and perseverance are the main fortes to surviving a marketplace where everyone has dreams that are as bright as yours. Of course, networking and going to particular comic conventions will definitely help you as well.

That is why I do freelance art assignments while working on my pet projects. It keeps things going and stabilizes a financial base of operations.

SP!: Was there one piece of advice that you're glad you were given or wish someone had given you, back when you were getting started?

WB: During my early stages of seeking an opportunity in major comic companies, I used to visit Continuity Studios, which was headed by Neal Adams. It was there that I received some advice that, at one time, I considered sacred.

Originally, I was there to get art pointers from Denys Cowan, who was penciling Luke Cage and Iron First at the time, but somehow, I struck up a short friendship with the late Marshal Rogers. This was shortly after his famous stint on Detective Comics.

His advice to me was this: Never draw characters that you are not interested in. If you like the Hulk, then draw samples of him and submit them to Marvel comics. Otherwise, the work will suffer and the job will seem like a drudgery. I held that advice true until I had to do freelance art gigs.

Mostly, a work for hire job won't be your dream project. It's something to put food on the table and pay bills, etc. But you will have to learn to love it no matter what, because it's helping you to survive and it's good training for any illustrator.

Bending the rules of Marshall's advice doesn't hurt if you are getting the experience you need and getting paid for what you love to do. And, by all means, keep it coming.

SP!: How did Little Miss Strange come about?

WB: One day in Visage Studios (headed by Rich Buckler) came a faithful phone call from a comic book promoter named Rusty Gilligan who needed some pinups for his indie magazine. This assignment was to also be a foothold into a series of trading cards as well.

Rusty suggested that each studio member do a female version of his favorite character. I began to ponder about this in a very public way. It was then that Buckler nudged me to do a female counterpart of Marvel Comics' Doctor Strange, Master of the Mystic Arts. During a previous conversation with Rich Buckler, I'd stated my tremendous fondness for the good doctor and my passion for Jimi Hendrix's music. And thus, Little Miss Strange was created that very day with a special place in the mainstream industry as the world's first black alien sorceress.

Showcased in Previews by Millennium Publications, she was on her way into the major comic shops. The joy of being a fulfilled artist is astonishing and can be humbling at the same time. I chose the latter path since I needed to make all the friends that I could to help me keep the character alive.

SP!: What can you tell us about the main character and the world she inhabits?

WB: First off, the character's real is Scorpia. Little Miss Strange is her nickname that was given to her as a child. Scorpia was raised in the temple of Satu, also known as the Temple of Time. There is a renegade priest who becomes the main bad guy but will return when the time comes.

Seven priests of the mystical order of Satu took care of her as she grew into womanhood. She is also a high priestess, as well as an extremely powerful sorceress in her own right.

Little Miss Strange is an immortal who possesses meta-level strength, reflexes, and stamina. She also has highly-enhanced mystical abilities, which she uses to fly at variable speeds (depending upon mode of travel), open a portal to any known dimension, and even travel though time.

Scorpia is known for her keen intellect and humorous views in dangerous situations.

Her group affiliation or teammates are Ishtarr, Nergal, and Papiloma. Hints of her origins can be found in the first graphic novel.

SP!: In 2010, you gave us the Immortal Fantasy Anthology. What can you tell us about the works presented?

WB: Immortal Fantasy is my own version of Heavy Metal Magazine. Reading those early stories inspired me to create this anthology. Another source material is a little-known Canadian based magazine called Orb.

The lead story is "The Vision," a sword and sorcery tale featuring Kotas the Dragon. I've always enjoyed the Robert E. Howard stories of Conan the Barbarian, Bran Mak Morn, and Solomon Kane. This is my personal tribute to that brand of literature.

Coming in as a strong second entry is "Star Ravage" highlighting the epic sci-fi adventures of Pozitron. His one man war against a race of mysterious demons known only as the Aganza is the focus of this premiere story.

Next up, we enter the horror arena with "A Junkie's Delight". I would imagine this to be somewhat a cautionary tale of 'don't use what you're selling'. Definitely an anti-drug story, but seductive at the same time.

Inspired by the classic horrormeister Boris Karloff and his television show Thriller, it's time for a little humor and fantasy with "The Secret Wonderland of D.H. Fudley." A mild-mannered couch potato seeks escape from his everyday, mundane life and boy, does he get it. Another idea inspired by a timeless television show, The Twilight Zone... in which the legendary actor Robert Duvall was the main drawing card.

Straight from the headlines of the newspapers comes "Blood and Scapegoats". It's based on the true crime/horror incident involving the West Memphis Three. Chilling and creepy, to say the least, and a tale you won't forget.

Winding down with the fantasy/horror of "The Jar," we see the heroine The White Raven survive a night of terror as she faces an evil spirit, hell-bent on absorbing her very being.

The final entry brings us back to Kotas the Dragon, as he is confronted with an ancestor from the past in "Specter of the Damned".

Quite a collection, I would say.

SP!: It sounds like! What inspired you to introduce Pozitron?

WB: This was a collaboration between myself and writer Robert E. Fennel. We both wanted something that would be unlike any science hero alive and Pozitron fits the bill, on all accounts. His world is full of grand-scale and epic outer space saga. All things considered, it can be seen as retro in hindsight, but it's a good premise to have a source material that stems from known and established pop culture and then turn it around on its ear. I never tired of planning his next adventure.

SP!: What would you say makes him unique?

WB: He has a space ship known as Homebase, a beautiful sidekick, and he is the father of Little Miss Strange. So, that would make him immortal as well... but I think his homage to space opera is unique, as it embodies elements of The Lensmen from pulp science fiction writer E.E. "Doc" Smith.

Most don't know that Pozitron is a person of color, a fact which is revealed in "Star Ravage."

And that is more than enough uniqueness for me.

SP!: Have you got a favorite story in Immortal Fantasy? If so, which one?

WB: Not sure about that... I like the whole ensemble of stories and the overall feel of the anthology, an achievement that I am truly proud of.

Perhaps, "Specter of the Damned"... It delves deeper into the world of the Dragon King and explores the mythos behind the hero and his people.

It's more of a mini-graphic novel, if you will and ends up defining the noble and heroic elements of Kotas the Dragon.

SP!: How have you handled the marketing and promotion end of things?

WB: Promoting is a time-consuming effort and can be tedious and rewarding all at the same time. I will say that it is more work than a 9-to-5 job. There is a paycheck at the of day in regular jobs, but not so much this one, unless you hustle and go to a lot of comic book shows, do book lectures, and do freelance art.

As I said before, this is a labor of love that only can be done by those driven to do it, because if it was easy, everyone would be doing it.

I used the general internet social media stuff, like all self-published artists, but the best approach will always be in person, so that your customers can put a face to these books and get beautifully skilled handcrafted autographs. Fun for all.

SP!: What's next on the horizon for you?

WB: Actually, Little Miss Strange 2 is in my queue of things to do. I have included some of the artwork to run with this interview. Mostly half-done and enhanced by gray-scale washtones, unlike the previous graphic novel.

But this time, I have a co-writer helping me to weave this sophomore event of Scorpia, Sorceress of Satu. A talented writer and good friend plus client, Jemir Robert Johnson. He did such a good job plotting out the second half of LMS 2 and even did a barebones outline of Little Miss Strange 3.

Our collaboration doesn't end there. I did a special comic story for Jemir's Blind Corners, a hardboiled crime drama series of graphic art that features J. Nova, the female sleuth who leads in all these detective cases.

I am putting together another anthology magazine entitled Dark Edge. This will exclusively establish black heroes or heroines, one such being the pseudo-African-based heroine Azana the Wanderer. I have a several pages done of her saga, already. She will also be getting a one-shot comic done by me and my constant partner, Jemir Johnson.

Immortal Fantasy 2 has one completed

Pozitron follow-up epic tale finished, but it's on hold until I brainstorm some more ideas and characters.

Lastly, I'm working on the pulp hero Midnight Phantom, whose adventures take place in 1930s Harlem. Yep, it's a collaboration piece done by me and Jemir. I will be applying my fine arts skills with a painted cover for this volume of pulp-inspired action.

Plenty to look forward to.

SP!: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention that we haven't touched on, yet?

WB: Yes, because the hits just keep on coming. Creepy Kofy Movie Time Comic #1 by Acme Ink gives my tonal skills a whirl. Based on an old job named "Corrina" I did with Trevor Von Eeden as penciller, Scott Goodell as inker, and a story by Stefan Jackson. This horror series is ongoing, but delayed by chief editor Mel Smith's challenged health conditions.

There is European interest in syndicating Corrina in full-color for a comic magazine called Hardware. British writer Paul H. Birch, as head honcho of the above periodical, has given me an open invitation to submit one of my characters in future Hardware issues as well. A project idea called "Mr. Bones" just might be a collaboration with Paul Birch.

Perihelion is an online science fiction magazine which hires me from time to time to do covers and spot illustration. Check it out when you get the chance. Sam Bellotto Jr., editor of the site, will be glad you did.

Would you believe that I have two children's books available on amazon.com.? One is called Jello, Pudding Pops and the other is My Father Found Bin Laden, penned by Donna Matthews.

Leopard's Moon is a collection of diverse stories, from sword-and-sorcery to science fiction. It is written by Melvin Carter who hired me to do all the black-and-white interior illustrations. It is also available on amazon.com.

Here's an interesting bit… I am the illustrator for a series of Ancient Roman poems named Virgil's Book of Bucolics, the Ten Eclogues. I have to thank Eddie Vega of Vegawire Media and Bareknuckle Press, along with the astute translator Prof. John Van Sickle for the opportunity to add my artistry to a literary classic. And finally, I will be unveiling my first art book in the near future with some of my Fine Arts, Comic Art and Digital Art. This special tome will be called Aura.

Time for me to take a breather. Whew!

SP!: How can folks keep up with you and your projects?

WB: I have a blog and a personal website… yeah, Facebook, too. I do commission work and freelance jobs for all clients.

Looks like it's about time to wrap this up… so check out the links below and hope you enjoyed this interview! Thanks.

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http://blakelyworkstudio.weebly.com/

amazon.com/author/winstonblakely

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